

MIDDLESEX COUNTY OFFICE OF HEALTH SERVICES

FACT SHEET



Extreme Heat Illness and Prevention (Heat Stroke and Heat Exhaustion)

What is heat stroke?

Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related illness. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

Who is at greatest risk of heat-related illness?

Although anyone at any time can suffer from heat-related illness, some people are at greater risk than others.

- Infants and young children
- People 65 years of age or older
- People who are physically ill
- People who are overweight
- People who overexert during work or exercise

Visit adults at risk at least twice a day and closely watch them for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Infants and young children, of course, need more frequent watching.

What are the warning signs of heat stroke?

Warning signs vary but may include the following:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103°F)
- Red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea

If you see any signs of severe heat stress, you may be dealing with a life-threatening emergency. Have someone call for immediate medical assistance while you begin cooling the affected person. Do the following:

- Get the person to a shady area.
- Cool the person rapidly using whatever methods you can. For example, immerse the person in a tub of cool water; place the person in a cool shower; spray the person with cool water from a garden hose; sponge the person with cool water; or if the humidity is low, wrap the person in a cool, wet sheet and fan him or her vigorously.
- Monitor body temperature and continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101-102°F.
- If emergency medical personnel are delayed, call the hospital emergency room for further instructions.
- Do not give the person alcohol to drink.
- Get medical assistance as soon as possible.

What is heat exhaustion?

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness that can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids.

What are the warning signs of heat exhaustion?

Warning signs vary but may include the following:

- Heavy sweating
- Paleness
- Muscle cramps
- Tiredness
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting
- Skin: may be cool and moist
- Pulse rate: fast and weak
- Breathing: fast and shallow

You can follow these prevention tips to protect yourself from heat-related stress:

- Drink cool, nonalcoholic beverages (If your doctor generally limits the amount of fluid you drink or has you on water pills, ask him how much you should drink when the weather is hot. Also, avoid extremely cold liquids because they can cause cramps.)
- Rest
- Take a cool shower, bath, or sponge bath
- If possible, seek an air-conditioned environment. (If you don't have air-conditioning, consider visiting an air-conditioned shopping mall or public library to cool off.)
- Wear lightweight clothing
- If possible, remain indoors in the heat of the day
- Do not engage in strenuous activities

How can I protect myself, others, and pets from extreme heat?

To protect the health of yourself, others, and pets when temperatures are extremely high, remember to keep cool and use common sense. The following tips are important:

- Stay cool indoors
 - If your home does not have air-conditioning, call your local Police Department, Office of Emergency Management, or Health Department to see if there are Cooling Centers in your area.
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Do not drink liquids that contain alcohol or large amounts of sugar
- Provide plenty of fresh water for your pets and leave the water in a shady area
- Avoid hot foods and heavy meals
- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose fitting clothing
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses if you go outdoors
- Apply sunscreen (SPF 15 or higher) 30 minutes prior to going outside and reapply according to package directions
- Limit your outdoor activity to morning and evening hours
- Pace yourself
- Do not leave infants, children, or pets in a parked car
- Use a buddy system
- Monitor those at high risk

Source of information: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/elderlyheat.asp>
http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat_guide.asp
http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat_guide-page-2.asp